

PETER PRINCIPLE

**WHAT IS ANARCHO-
SYNDICALISM?**

(1997)



**PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &
DISCUSSIONS
FOR LAND & FREEDOM**

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE
'ANARCHIVE'
"Anarchy is Order!"

*'I must Create a System or be enslav'd by
another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business
is to Create'
(William Blake)*

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchival' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new

anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

'Anarchy Is Order' does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.

Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing texts from the CD (collecting all available texts at a given moment) that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts to friends and new ones to us,... Become your own anarchiv!!!

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchiv offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*“...demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down
here;
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and
wish to
squash us like horseflies;
and the will-‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance.”
(L-P. Boon)*

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us.
Don't mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be sent
to A.O@advalvas.be.

A complete list and updates are available on this
address, new texts are always

welcome!!

WHAT IS ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM?

Libertarian reformism, vanguardism or revolutionary unionism?

PETER PRINCIPLE

First published in Black Flag, Spring 1997

About a dozen years ago a pamphlet published by the Direct Action Movement asserted that the (anarcho-syndicalist) International Workers' Association contained three main currents - Anarcho-Syndicalists, Revolutionary Syndicalists and Syndicalists. In reality there is no such thing as just "syndicalism", and anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism are one and the same thing.

However, the pamphlet's author, Col Longmore, was describing debates within the International between poles described in these terms. The debate is really between a kind of anarchist vanguardism (styling itself anarcho-syndicalism) and a libertarian reformism (styling itself revolutionary syndicalism). Both poles of the debate contain elements of anarcho-syndicalism, but each is being selective in its interpretation.

The vanguardists emphasise the anarchist principles, particularly opposition to class collaboration exemplified by the longstanding IWA hostility to participation in Works Councils [1] and collaboration with the state, and are keen that all actions of affiliated unions pass stringent standards of political soundness. The libertarian

reformists are just as disingenuous in their emphasis on other principles, particularly apolitical membership, mass recruitment and union autonomy. For the principled anarcho-syndicalist there are merits to both viewpoints, but we fall between self-righteous stagnation on the one hand, and a drift towards class collaboration on the other.

This debate remains stillborn within the confines of the IWA today. The existence of libertarian reformist organisations is not seen as evidence of a problem facing anarcho-syndicalism as it breaks out of its sects and ghettos, to be analysed and avoided as we seek to establish a revolutionary practice in the here and now. The discourse is one of contagious treachery, exposure to which must be avoided in order to remain revolutionary. The penalty for exposure is demonisation and expulsion, and deep suspicion of any comrades with whom there is contact.

To do this debate justice it needs to take place both among and beyond the (disputed) membership of the International, because the majority of those who need to speak and to hear are those whose participation is currently taboo. For many of us revolutionary organisation poses a challenge. To meet it we need to recognise, understand and overcome the flaws in our theories, organisations and strategies that can lead to libertarian reformism. We find it bizarre that we can work with authoritarian reformists, whose organisations can teach us little about our own, but must shun libertarians from whose reformism we can learn and strengthen our own revolutionary organisation and resolve.

Revolutionary Unionism

Syndicalisme Revolutionnaire is the French term coined to describe the theory and practice of the Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT), set up by anarchists such as Emile Pouget in post-Commune France in response to the party-affiliated fragmentation and impotence of the labour movement. It stressed workers' unity and militancy and an anti-parliamentary practice based on direct action and revolution precipitated by the Social General Strike. Apoliticism (as an antidote to party-affiliated unions) and union autonomy, a result of the anarchists' federalism, were always part of its make-up.

It is worth remembering that it was French anarchists who first coined the term "libertarian" to describe themselves as a means of avoiding the post-Commune censorship, and who found that the content of their ideas and activities was more important than a label that carried the certainty of repression. (It would be many years before "anarchist" became a term safe for bourgeois liberals and individualists to cloak themselves in spurious radicalism with.)

The history of revolutionary labour movements is dominated by Spain, however. The lack of scope for reformist trades unionism meant that, aside from the Asturian mineworkers, the Socialist Party-affiliated Union General de Trabajo (UGT) was composed predominantly of craft unions before the industrial boom provided by Spanish neutrality in the 1914-18 War.

This left the organisation of semi-skilled and often internal migrant workers to the anarchists. Cycles of organisation and repression linked to political upheavals

eventually gave birth to the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in 1910-11. The close identity of anarchism and mass labour organisation in Spain and its former colonies meant that in the Spanish-speaking world the same phenomenon as the practice of the French CGT was termed more explicitly anarcosindicalismo.

The two terms describe the same phenomenon, although in the English-speaking world Syndicalisme Revolutionnaire became "syndicalism". This is also the direct political descendent of the federalist workers' organisations affiliated to the original International Working Men's Association, for whom Michael Bakunin served as a spokesman. Indeed, the modern IWA was formed in 1922 as a reformation of that organisation. Federalist and economic, not centralist and political.

We also got the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose English language publications are more readily available than translations of our French and Spanish antecedents' propaganda and ideas. Technically-speaking the IWW espouse a theory called Industrial Unionism (the One Big Union), derived from the ideas of American marxist and Socialist Labour Party leader Daniel De Leon.

This is also the form of socialism espoused by Irish Republican hero James Connolly, incidentally, although you'd be hard pressed to get any "socialist republicans" to admit he was a syndicalist, and you won't find Socialism made easy, his fullest exposition of his syndicalist ideas, in the most recent edition of his complete works, either.

The only people I can think of who call themselves just Syndicalists as if it was some kind of distinct theory are Hull Syndicalists/Syndicalist Bulletin. They draw heavily on the 1930's IWW ideas expressed in Ralph Chaplin's The General Strike, which is pacifist and hostile to any activity not focussed on the workplace. It was pushing this agenda alongside an ill-concealed hostility to anarchism in the pages of Direct Action which led to their acrimonious departure from DAM in 1986.

Partly as a result of the spurious anarcho/revolutionary syndicalism split, partly to give our ideas a label in plain English and complete the translation of Syndicalisme Revolutionnaire, I prefer to use the term "revolutionary unionism". What I mean by this is anarcho-syndicalism, undiluted and without distortions.

Vanguard, what vanguard?

One problem with the use of the term anarcho-syndicalism in Britain is the fact that in the early 1980's genuine anarchists adopted the term in order to distinguish ourselves from the pacifists, hippies, liberals, individualists and eco-fascists who were

able to call themselves anarchists without either understanding the term or having its meaning rammed down their throats after their teeth by aggrieved proles. Unfortunately, many of the anarchists (real ones) had as sketchy an idea of anarcho-syndicalism as the unwashed had of anarchism.

While this is partly due to the lack of concrete anarcho-syndicalist organisation and practice and of English

language propaganda, the existence of both in Spain, for example, has not prevented similar problems from arising there. The real problem has to do with the legacy of (fascist) repression in the 1930's and post-war labour policies in Western Europe. The living culture of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism has been interrupted by these events, and it has been possible to dress cobblers up as anarchism without being shown up by the real thing.

A widely-held view of anarcho-syndicalism involves a misreading of history and of the role of anarchist organisations. This view can be summed up as "if you have your CNT, you need your FAI". The FAI was the Federacion Anarquista Iberica, in reality a loose federation of diverse anarchist groups embracing everyone from those who would today be termed lifestylelists to those active in CNT Defence Committees.

Many anarchists misread the FAI as a vanguard organisation essential to keeping the CNT on its revolutionary course, without which it would have succumbed to the reformist tendencies fools believe to be inherent in the working class and our organisation (some "anarchists" show a remarkable consistency with leninism at times).

While the above characterisation may be over-simplified it accurately sums up the basis on which some comrades, who currently dominate the IWA, act. The role of the contemporary FAI in both the (Spanish) CNT-E and the IWA is questionable, but it continues to haunt us. Historically, it would have been both impossible and unprincipled for the FAI, or any faction, to control the CNT, or any mass anarcho-syndicalist organisation.

Although anarchists did fight reformists within the CNT in the 1930's, notably the bureaucrat Angel Pestana, they did so as anarcho-syndicalist workers preserving federalist, autonomist and democratic principles which were basic to the union's principles and culture, not as a rival leadership. There was no role for a vanguard to play because a healthy anarcho-syndicalist organisation established through class struggles dating back to the 1860's embodied a tradition and culture of libertarian organisation which belonged to the working class as a whole, not to some "revolutionary" priesthood.

The destruction of such mass organisations by fascism and the Allied victory in the 1940's has robbed us of our culture and left us nursing a shadow of it. It is unfortunate that the guardians of the shadow seem to prefer it, which they own, to the real thing, which belongs to the working class as a whole.

Post-War stagnation

The IWA suffered post-war stagnation - the CNT was in exile; the Swedish SAC was sucked into collaboration with the state in order to survive in a society dominated by social democracy, robbing the international of its last mass organisation; prominent

anarcho-syndicalists like Rudolf Rocker and Augustin Souchy came out in favour of bourgeois democracy. Resistance continued in Spain, however, and provided a focus for networks of anarchists in Western Europe.

When younger revolutionaries attracted to armed resistance became active in the late '60's and the '70's as

part of the re-emergence of revolutionary activity characterised by workers' militancy in Britain and the "events" of 1968, a link with our history was there. Our comrade Albert Meltzer played a key role in this process, and Black Flag is part of its legacy.

With the death of Franco in 1975, underground networks who had maintained the traditions of anarcho-syndicalism, as well as participating in armed resistance actions (both branded "terrorism" by the state), re-formed the CNT. The reaction of the exiled organisation is instructive - they denounced the militants for using the name CNT, as it was the property of the exile organisation!

Reality won through eventually, and led to a revival of the IWA in the late '70's, among the other sections were the CNT-F in France and the revived Unione Sindicale Italiano (USI). The (allegedly three) members of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation in Britain formed the Direct Action Movement in 1979 with a disparate membership of anarcho-punks, squatters, ex-Wobblies, stray Australians, etc. Since the reformation of the CNT-E was the catalyst for this revival, it took some years for the British Section - DAM - to get over a hero-worship phase towards the Spanish Section.

A long-running controversy in the IWA was the participation of the CNT-F in elections for Works Councils, for propaganda purposes on an abstentionist basis (or so we have always been told). This section was also traditionally the "revolutionary syndicalist" source of opposition to the affiliation of anarchist-dominated anarcho-syndicalist "propaganda groups", as opposed to revolutionary/anarcho-syndicalist unions only. The

former issue was a matter of debate within the French CNT, but the majority position remained that unions might participate in elections on an abstentionist basis, and that this fell into the sphere of union autonomy.

Another was relations with the ex-Section in Sweden, SAC, now firmly established as a reformist union dispensing welfare to workers on behalf of the state in the Swedish mould, but with a strong pride in its libertarian traditions and a degree of militancy at

odds with social democracy. SAC's pluralist political culture leads it to seek international relations with any union or political group who will deal with it, and to plead innocence when it causes offence.

Patrimony

Ultimately, the most damaging process has been the dispute over the CNT-E's "historic patrimony". In 1939 the victorious nationalists seized the assets of both the CNT and the UGT. Part of the process of "restoring democracy" was the return of these assets to those unions, the greater share of which belonged to the majority union in Spain at the time - the CNT. The attraction of the money caused two splits from the CNT to unite and claim that they were the real, "Renovated" CNT, and that the anarcho-syndicalist organisation recognised by the IWA was merely a rump living in the past.

Since the patrimony was held by the state, the CNT went to court to settle the dispute, causing varying degrees of disquiet among anarcho-syndicalists worldwide. While officially maintaining loyalty to the CNT-AIT and

denying the lie that there were two CNT's in Spain, other IWA Sections sought clarification of the CNT-E's position and to express concern over an anarcho-syndicalist union asking the state to establish its credentials.

Muddying the waters was the SAC, who offered assistance (financial) to "both CNT's", which the phoney, reformist organisation accepted, and the CNT-AIT refused - partly due to SAC's dealings with the rival claimants, and partly due to official IWA hostility to SAC dating back to the dispute over which SAC disaffiliated in the '50's.

SAC has always claimed innocent neutrality in its defence, but this is the neutrality of the arms dealer, prolonging the dispute and increasing the bitterness both in Spain and towards itself. I strongly suspect that had SAC offered assistance only to the CNT-AIT the original dispute would have been regarded as an irrelevance.

Bizarrely, among those championing the "two CNT's" theory were the anti-syndicalist anarchists who endorse the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, among them the newly-formed Anarchist-Communist Federation in Britain. Strangely, those who are convinced that anarcho-syndicalism is reformist, and who have adopted a neo-council communist line on unions [2], are the first to endorse libertarian reformists who claim to be anarcho-syndicalist (particularly in France where there is a proliferation of both groups) even as they make denunciation of the real thing their distinguishing characteristic in the "revolutionary" marketplace.

The root cause of the splits in Spain had been participation in Works Councils, which although associated with the European Union and the Maastricht Treaty's Social Chapter are the direct descendants of the fascist corporatism of the Franco regime in Spain. The CNT-AIT promoted the idea of the Union Section - shopfloor organisation represented by directly-elected, recallable delegates - in opposition to the Works Councils, which are a form of industrial parliamentarism.

Eventually, the courts ruled in favour of the CNT-AIT, and the "CNT-R" was forced to change its name to CGT. At the XVIII Congress of the IWA held in Bordeaux at Easter 1988 the dispute was still in the hands of the judges, and a source of friction between the CNT-E and other sections. The attitude of some Spanish delegates, and of their General Secretary, Garcia Rua, to any query about the CNT-E's attitude towards other sections and the use of courts (ie collaboration with the state) was openly hostile. It was also obvious that some of our "comrades" in Spain regard the IWA as their overseas auxiliaries, not fellow anarcho-syndicalists working under different conditions.

The problems this caused led the members of the CNT-E National Committee present to soften the organisation's attitude, and to decide that the IWA Secretariat should not be drawn from members of the Spanish Section. It was eventually forced on a member of the German Section, the Freie Arbeiterinnen und Arbeiter Union (FAU).

While the move of the Secretariat led to greater openness in the International, and vastly improved communication, particularly for non-Spanish speaking

sections, the personality of the General Secretary and his relationship with the Section from which he had been chosen [3] caused a lot of problems. This led to the Secretariat returning to Spain in 1992 - two steps forward, one step back as it turned out.

The French dispute

Having settled the patrimony dispute to the satisfaction of the CNT-E, the attention of the IWA turned to expansion, particularly in Eastern Europe in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet system, and also in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is still a source of strength and hope for the international, but sectarianism [4] continues to dominate.

Among those lending support to the CNT-E in the patrimony dispute was a Swiss groupuscule calling itself Les Amis de l'AIT (Friends of the IWA), which specialised in exposing the dubious associations of those supporting the future CGT in Spain. As a reward for this they were awarded the status of "Friends of the IWA", which is neither a Section nor a Candidate seeking affiliation, but has a de facto privileged status nevertheless.

Having reached an impasse through the proper channels, the minority within the CNT-F who were implacably opposed to any involvement with Works Councils or elections to them decided to internationalise the dispute. This they did by engineering a split (although outwardly conciliatory, the majority appeared quite happy to let this happen), and demanding the IWA Secretariat recognise them, not the majority, as the true IWA Section in France.

Quite rightly the General Secretary declined to interfere in the internal business of a Section, and for this he was vilified by the Swiss, who then offered themselves as "impartial mediator" in the dispute! Matters spilled over at a Plenary of the IWA held in London in 1994, which involved provocative dossier flicking by the minority faction, known as "Bordeaux" who claimed that some of the unions in France had only one member, and were a paper majority. It culminated in a walkout by the minority faction from the next Plenary in Cologne when they weren't endorsed as the sole representatives of the French Section.

This coincided with the build-up of an increasingly poisonous atmosphere in Spain, sparked by the receipt of the patrimony from the state, and disputes about its distribution. Certainly the then General Secretary of the IWA was under pressure from his Section, in breach of the rules, to take sides in the French dispute. Eventually he resigned under the pressure.

The legacy of the patrimony dispute, and the corrupting influence of the money, has had an impact on the nature of the CNT-E. Small, unpopular unions run by those whose families have traditionally been associated with the CNT have received money, and are now no longer dependent on the support of the larger unions.

Those who see the CNT and anarcho-syndicalism as their property, forced to compromise in 1975, have taken revenge on the modern CNT. The majority of the CNT in Catalunya has been expelled. In international terms the clock has turned back to 1988, and the Spanish Section is

now dominated by those who see the IWA as merely its auxiliary.

This process has been confirmed at the XX Congress of the IWA, held at Madrid in December 1996. The CNT-E tried to exclude one of the parties to each dispute - in France and Italy - at the stage of confirmation of credentials, before any debate had taken place. Attempts to investigate the disputes fully, in order to have sufficient information to make the right decision, were rejected. This led to only two Sections voting to expel the majority in France and the Rome-based split of USI - CNT-E and Norway's NSF.

The rest abstained due to insufficient information, and the British Section were told by the hosts that they were not following their mandate in an attempt to get another vote for expulsion. In fact the Solidarity Federation's mandate was based on full investigation and reconciliation where possible, and it is a measure of the proprietorial attitude of the host Section that they should regard another Section's delegates as accountable to them.

The decision to expel the majority in France was greeted by cheering from many Spanish observers and the busload of "Bordeaux" CNT-F who had turned up. An atmosphere of intimidation and confusion was encouraged by the hosts, and exploited to slip through changes to the Principles of Revolutionary Unionism and the Statutes of the IWA without proper discussion or consideration of their implications. A comrade from the British Section was abused by another from Spain when trying to establish some order and clarity from the chair.

Principled anarcho-syndicalists now face the prospect of spending the next four years trying to repair the damage, and in all likelihood such a course will attract the attentions of the smear-machine which runs the Swiss franchise - sold to Les Amis de 'AIT in return for political support for the sectarians.

Laying down the line

The majority CNT-F has retained its name - it was affiliated to the IWA, but existed in its own right - and is consistent with its own traditions, warts and all. By not investigating the French and Italian disputes thoroughly, the IWA has wasted an opportunity to get at the truth (we think we've been misled or lied to by both sides), and to examine the relevance of anarcho-syndicalism in the real world. It has also missed an opportunity to identify how an anarcho-syndicalist union can drift towards libertarian reformism.

Worse, the Statutes of the International have been amended to create "conditions for disaffiliation" (expulsion), which include:

"A) Failure to comply with the Principles, Tactics and Aims of the IWA." (My italics.) **[WEB editor: The version I received was text only so all Italics etc are lost]**

The word "Tactics" also now appears in the Conditions of Affiliation. There are no "IWA Tactics". This is saying that no section has the right to tactical freedom, or to allow union autonomy. We await the party line, based on the assumption that Spanish conditions are universal. Opposition to Works Councils, in the guise of opposition to class collaboration, has now been elevated to a

universal principle, rather than being a matter for sections. We were supposed to be becoming less eurocentric.

Similarly, an attempt to update the Principles of Revolutionary Unionism by adding two points, on Environmentalism and on forms of oppression not economic in origin (race, gender, sexuality, etc), has had a negative outcome. Both points were proposed by the Solidarity Federation. The point about environmentalism was accepted. On the other point we suddenly found ourselves in Militant....

The Solidarity Federation proposed:

"Revolutionary unionism is opposed to all hierarchies, privileges and oppressions, not simply those which are economic in origin. It recognises that oppression can be based on race, gender, sexuality or any other perceived or actual difference, and that these oppressions both must be fought for their own sake, and because they are fundamental to the maintenance of capitalism. However, all oppression, whatever its origin, has an economic aspect and is based on a power relationship. Concepts of "equality" which fail to recognise this fact, and any attempt to fight discrimination without also attacking hierarchy and privilege based on class will chiefly benefit hitherto excluded sections of privileged classes, and will not end discrimination against those without class privileges, even where they achieve some short term gains."

What was drawn up by a Congress Commission and passed without proper discussion was (amendment in *italics*):

"6 Revolutionary unionism rejects all parliamentary activity and all collaboration with legislative bodies. It holds that even the freest voting system cannot bring about the disappearance of the clear contradictions at the centre of present day society

The parliamentary system has only one goal: to lend a pretence of legitimacy to the reign of falsehood and social injustice. Revolutionary unionism does not recognise differences other than those of the economic order, national or regional, the result of these being the emergence of hierarchies, privileges and oppressions of every type (for race, sex, sexuality, or whatever difference, perceived or real)."

Try arguing with black workers that racism merely divides the working class, and is a diversion from the real struggle, rather than it is oppressive and must be fought in its own right, but is not independent of capitalism and class. I know what they think of that position, because I've seen the left, with their commitment to a 19th century universalism derived from the pseudo-science of marxism, try it. It's patronising. This is nearly the 21st century, the IWA has responded to the lessons of black, women' and gay liberation by diving back into the 19th.

Federalism, which includes such principles as regional and union autonomy, encourages diversity. At its XX Congress the IWA has subtly, possibly unintentionally, moved away from federalism and betrayed its anarcho-syndicalist heritage because of a preoccupation with sectarian disputes and the proprietorial attitude of the CNT-E towards both the IWA and anarcho-syndicalism.

The challenge facing revolutionary unionists is to be true to our heritage, and to apply our principles to the world we live in, rather than retreating into what is familiar.

Principles in practice

Article 4, Part D of the Statutes of the International Workers' Association now reads:

"Revolutionary unionism rejects class collaboration, which is characterised by the participation in committees organised under corporate state schemes, (for example in union elections for company committees) and the acceptance of state subsidies which maintain union officials and other practices that can distort anarcho-syndicalism."

This is all very well but it assumes the Spanish model of industrial relations is universal, which it clearly isn't. Any potential anarcho-syndicalist union in Britain seeking recognition under Labour's proposed law to grant it to any union gaining a vote of 50% of the workforce in a (state sponsored) ballot would find itself in a tricky situation. If you can't deliver to your members, and you can't strike over everything, they will go elsewhere. OK, you strike for recognition, but your members will be lured to a reformist outfit who will use the law.

This new Article also puts question marks over such things as facility time for union representatives, and any participation in collective bargaining machinery. While ideally anyone would rather all management initiatives were rejected out of hand, sometimes they can be neutralised, or problems avoided through talking.

We can play a double game in reformist unions, but impossible conditions are expected of a revolutionary union. There has to be room for union autonomy, and for people to make mistakes so that they can learn. As one French comrade once put it: "anarcho-syndicalism is like free speech, useless if you don't practise it."

This is the kind of dilemma that has faced anarcho-syndicalists on the continent. You recruit workers to your union on the basis of direct democracy, recallable delegates, control by the rank and file and direct action. Inevitably, they are not all anarchists, and are not committed to every dot and comma of the IWA Statutes, but there's nothing wrong with that because it's an anarcho-syndicalist union, not a disciplined party. You make some progress in getting revolutionary ideas across, and build up a libertarian culture of self-organisation.

Then you run up against a conflict between your apolitical membership (described above) and federalist union autonomy on the one hand, and too rigid an interpretation of anarchist principles on the other. Now, it's a mistake to base commitment to a union on a ballot, rather than on solidarity built up through a strike, but recognition on more than paper is going to lead to the latter after you've won the former. You learn (collectively) from the mistake. However, you are not allowed to make mistakes, and you've all been disaffiliated for breaching IWA Statutes.

In an anarchist journal like this it is easy to understand the thinking behind the IWA Statutes, but in the real world choices are harder. In France, in the private sector,

CNT-F claims that Works Councils are the only means of gaining recognition. CNT-F unions have sought election to them, a grave error, but one you don't get to make twice. The natural consequence of union autonomy, an anarcho-syndicalist principle, is tactical flexibility. In Spain too, anarchists whose ex-CNT-E unions were expelled have ended up in the CGT.

To demonise these unions and their members is a grave error, because there are anarcho-syndicalists in them too. What is needed is communication, honesty and full information. The reason anarcho-syndicalism is advocated by this journal instead of disciplined political groups is because it establishes a libertarian, revolutionary culture within the wider working class. Without such a culture there can not be a successful social revolution, because that can only be made by the working class as a whole.

To put on a tactical straitjacket will prevent us gaining a mass audience for anarcho-syndicalism, without which it is pointless. We need to accept this, and to strike a working balance. Reformism is a real danger, we need to learn from other's mistakes but we will learn nothing from retreating into sectarianism.

Where the Solidarity Federation stands at present we have an opportunity to avoid both errors, which are the product of a split, which has been manipulated by libertarian reformists and opportunists on the one hand, and vanguardists on the other. We must stick to our principles, but appreciate that the relevance of a hardline stance is going to be directly proportional to the level of hostility of the boss. Most fruitful will be areas where

there is discontent and potential militancy, but no established union and negotiating structures.

If workers learn to organise the anarcho-syndicalist way, they will be sceptical of the reformist way. The top-down approach of the TUC affiliates scared of their members opens the way for us. Revolutionary unionists need to fill the vacuum they leave, by organising to win small victories around health and safety and other basic conditions, to organise education and briefing sessions on real issues, and to promote libertarian organisation, direct action methods and revolutionary goals as a practical package for establishing rights for workers.

Notes:

[1] Works Councils are advocated by the European Union as part of its Social dimension. They are consultative bodies composed of annually-elected representatives. They have no power to negotiate and are a means of bypassing unions, and introducing individualised relationships between the workers and the company. They are consistent with the fascist idea of corporatism, denying differences of class interest and promoting social harmony. The Solidarity Federation is opposed to them, the TUC is sceptical, being in favour of collective bargaining. Labour....

[2] Many left or council communists believe that all unions are inherently reformist, and are barriers to workers' militancy, let alone revolution. Workers' experience of unions as their own organisations, and shopfloor organisations self-organised character are dismissed out of hand. The contradiction between the shopfloor union which belongs to the workers and the corporate body which has a stake in capitalism, hence the behaviour of its bureaucracy, is not recognised, and cannot, therefore, be exploited. But if you are against workers' organisation except under revolutionary conditions you can slag off everyone under the guise of being more revolutionary than they are.

[3] While in office, the General Secretary and the other members of the IWA Secretariat cease to be members of their Section. This is intended to remove them from any pressure, and to ensure their neutrality. Unfortunately, it has not worked like that when the General Secretary has come from either Germany or Spain in recent years. In the case of the 1988-1992 period of office, a dispute

between the General Secretary and FAU over its direction overshadowed the work of the Secretariat. When the Secretariat has been in Spain it has not always looked beyond the Spanish-speaking world.

[4] By sectarian I mean requiring the working class to share your own political perspective, rather than applying revolutionary principles to the reality experienced by the working class. Revolutionary ideas come from the working class and its tradition of self-organisation. As well as federalism, anarchism and by extension anarcho-syndicalism draw on the practice of the sans culottes in the French Revolution of 1789-1792. Kropotkin's history of those events is a good grounding in anarchist theory. The left often use sectarianism to mean attacking other political groups, but it is the sense of insularity which is damaging, and which I refer to here.